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In Memoriam.

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*The Gift of
The Author.*

*George Livermore, Esq.
of Cambridge.*

*Recd. May 28.
1855.*



A MERCHANT OF THE OLD SCHOOL.

A

Tribute to the Memory

OF

JAMES JOHNSON.

Printed for Private Distribution.

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"THE bigotry of the ancient Canonists regarded trade as inconsistent with Christianity; and the Council of Melfi, under Pope Urban II., decreed that it was impossible to exercise any traffic, or even to follow the profession of the law, with a safe conscience. God forbid that, while we scoff at the doctrine which would excommunicate commerce from the pale of Christianity, we should embrace the far more fatal doctrine, which should regard the principles of Christianity as having no place and no authority in the pursuits of commerce!"— *Address before the Boston Mercantile Library Association, 1845. By the Hon. ROBERT C. WINTHROP, LL.D.*

PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following brief Biographical Sketch of one who, for nearly fifty years, was well known as an upright, sagacious, and successful merchant, was prepared for the "Boston Daily Advertiser," and published in that paper several days since. A few copies, in a more convenient form for preservation, are now printed for those friends who may be glad to preserve some memorial, though it be very meagre and imperfect, of the good man who has just departed. The writer knew him, more or less intimately, for upwards of thirty years. For more than half that period, he has often met him in near business relations. What he has said, therefore, is the result of personal knowledge. To those who were best acquainted with Mr. Johnson, the excellences of his character will not appear overstated. To others who may see these pages, it is only necessary to say, that his simplicity and humility were so great as to conceal from a careless observer not a few of the graces that adorned his life.

G. L.

PEARL STREET, May 15, 1855.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

It would not be well to allow the respected merchant who has recently been so suddenly taken from the active duties of this world, to pass away with no other notice than the bare announcement of his death. Although no formal eulogy is needed to proclaim his sterling worth, or to cause his memory to be cherished with respectful regard by the many who knew him, yet it is a grateful duty to call up and consider some of the circumstances of his career, and some of the prominent characteristics which caused him to be so highly esteemed during his long life, and so sincerely mourned at his death. The example of useful industry, strict integrity, and practical wisdom, which Mr. Johnson has left to our young merchants, is a legacy not to be lightly prized by them. The lesson of his life should not be lost.

JAMES JOHNSON was born at North Andover, March 2, 1783. In the early days of his boyhood, he enjoyed the common advantages of the public school of his native town; and scarcely any other opportunities of education in seminaries of learning were ever afforded him. The practical teachings, however, which, in this country, come home to all, were not neglected by him; and, if he could not be called a *learned* man, he could, with strict truth, be said to be *well educated* and highly intelligent. When quite young, he entered the store of David How, a well-known trader of Haverhill, then engaged in a large country business. There he remained till after he attained his majority.

Mr. Johnson came to Boston in 1806, to commence business for himself, with a cash capital of less than one hundred dollars, but with a fund of good principle, economical habits, and energetic purpose, which afforded a surer guaranty of ultimate success than any amount of mere money would have done.

Like him who has reflected upon the mercantile community, not only of Boston, but of the whole country, the credit acquired by the able discharge of the highest diplomatic function which that country

recognizes, Mr. Johnson never ignored the humble beginnings of his prosperous life.

He began business in a shop in Union Street, of small capacity and cheap rent. He bought his goods in moderate quantities, and was not ashamed to take them home, oftentimes, under his own arm. His profits were not at first large, and his accumulations were slow, especially during the dark and troublous times of the embargo and the war. He has often been heard to say, that, for the first fifteen years after he came to Boston, he gained (besides his frugal living) but little more than his experience and good name. These, however, were invaluable to him. In these he laid the deep and solid foundation of that honorable mercantile character which carried him on in continued and complete success.

In 1817, Mr. Johnson formed a business connection with the late William Sewall, and soon after commenced the importation of British dry goods. For this purpose he twice visited England, in 1822 and 1824.

About the year 1825, when New England capitalists began to turn their attention to the extensive manufacture of woollen goods, this firm directed its attention largely to that interest, and, in one of its

departments, soon took the lead. It was here, as a commission merchant, standing between and acting for both the manufacturer and the purchaser, that his powers as an intelligent, upright, and liberal-minded man of business were fully developed.

His object did not seem to be to manage his affairs solely for the purpose of securing to himself an ample fortune, but he appeared always to be anxious that others should share in his success. Whilst, in the true spirit of his calling, he was not unmindful of his own right to a fair profit from his mercantile transactions, he ever had an equal eye to the good of those who entrusted their business to his care. Indeed, it may be said without exaggeration, that he appeared to labor with more zeal to promote their interests than his own. That large group of successful flannel manufacturers, who have, for so long a time, resorted to him as to a counsellor and friend, bear, by their prosperity, a living and lasting testimony to the unselfishness of his conduct. The veterans in this line, who, for a period of thirty years have uninterruptedly kept their accounts with him, are among the warmest in speaking his praise. His counting-room was a favorite resort; and there his numerous business associates loved to listen to his

words of counsel and advice, uttered in his peculiar, racy manner; but leaving always a residuum of sound sense and practical wisdom which could not pass unheeded.

Although, during the latter part of his life, Mr. Johnson employed a portion of his wealth in foreign commerce, yet it was in the mercantile house which he founded that his chief interest centred. The name of his firm has long been regarded, not only in Boston, but wherever its extensive business has spread, as synonymous with uprightness and mercantile honor. He has left it, a significant monument of his sagacity and integrity. It is pleasant to feel the assurance, that, under the direction of those who by education and sympathy, as well as by the ties of relationship, have been wont to honor his character, and co-operate in his efforts, it will be preserved, as far as is practicable, unchanged.

Mr. Johnson was a good specimen of the merchant of the old school. He belonged to that class by which Boston has long been so proudly distinguished, but which has had such large inroads made in its numbers by the death, within a short time, of a Perkins, a Lawrence, an Appleton, a Shaw, a Wales, and, within a few days, a Wigglesworth. He regarded the

solid qualities of sagacity, industry, and integrity, rather than the mere showy and forward smartness which not unfrequently places its possessor for a time in a position of note in the business community, but often leaves him, before middle life, a bankrupt in property and reputation. He well knew the snares that awaited him who "makes haste to be rich." He would not, for hope of great and speedy gains, embark in extraordinary and hazardous speculations, but pursued the even tenor of his way from the commencement to the close of his long career.

He was not a public man in the ordinary use of that phrase. His services were highly valued as a director in some of the financial and other institutions connected with mercantile affairs; but his name was never brought forward for political honors or promotion. He well understood that his talents would be more usefully employed by giving his undivided efforts to the calling he had chosen. He took no narrow view of the vocation of the merchant. He knew that it afforded a field for the full exercise of some of the noblest gifts and graces that adorn and bless the human race.

It has been said by Roscoe, — no mean authority on such a subject, — "that of all the bonds by which

society is at this day united, those of mercantile connection are the most numerous and most extensive." The distinguished biographer of the Florentine merchant, who has made familiar to the world the name and the fame of Lorenzo De Medici, proved by his own example that a life of active business is not incompatible with the highest culture and the most liberal patriotism and philanthropy. Mr. Johnson, whilst pursuing earnestly and chiefly the business of his choice, kept up a general interest in the political, religious, and social affairs of the community in which he dwelt. Though not an active politician, he prized highly the privilege of voting, and always exercised that right intelligently.

The youthful and eloquent Buckminster was ordained as the minister of the Brattle-street Church the year before Mr. Johnson came to Boston. Under his pastoral care, and that of all of his honored successors, he continued a member of that religious society, and a constant attendant on the Sunday services there, till within a few years; when, on his removal to another part of the city, he selected a nearer place of worship. He showed, in his daily life, that he not only listened attentively to the teachings of religion, but governed his life by its rules.

He often reminded those around him of the good man mentioned by the Psalmist: —

“ Who to his plighted vows and trusts
Has ever firmly stood;
And, though he promise to his loss,
He makes his promise good.”

During the latter years of his life, Mr. Johnson's interest in religious matters greatly increased, and he made a public profession of his faith. A more truly humble, sincere, and consistent disciple is seldom found.

Though never married, he was by no means unsocial in his disposition. He loved to gather around him, without ceremony or display, in that home which he made for others more than for himself, his affectionate relatives and friends, and to render them happy.

He never, in the days of his prosperity, forgot the home of his childhood. His native town and the associates of his early years were always dear to him. On the days of the annual Thanksgiving and Fast he was always there, and attended the religious services as well as enjoyed social intercourse with his friends.

He took a strong interest in the Rural Cemetery which has lately been consecrated at that place, and prepared a lot for himself only a short time before he was called to occupy it.

He had reached a ripe old age, of more than "threescore years and ten," when, in the enjoyment of his usual health, and in the full possession of all his faculties, at the close of a day of active business in which he had taken a part with his accustomed zest, on his way to his quiet home, his step faltered; and, on reaching the door, he fell, and was taken to his room, where he soon peacefully slept, no more to awake on earth. He died on the 26th of April, in the 73d year of his age, surrounded by those who loved and respected him. It was a beautiful and fitting close to a long and useful life.

"Of no distemper, of no blast, he died,
But fell like autumn fruit that mellowed long."

The funeral took place from "The Second Church," in Bedford Street, on Saturday, April 28th. It was the purpose of the family, in accordance with the well-known retiring habits of the deceased, to have only private services at the house. But, at the

request of many mercantile friends, they yielded their wishes to the general desire for a more public testimonial of respect. The stores of many merchants throughout the city were closed at the time, and the church was filled with an assembly of sincere mourners. After a few appropriate remarks by the Rev. Mr. Robbins, the minister of the church ; selections from the Scriptures by the Rev. Dr. Lothrop, his former pastor ; a prayer by Rev. Mr. Robbins ; and a solemn chant by the choir, — the remains were taken to North Andover, to be placed in the grave which he had selected, within sight of the spot where he was born.

There, too, were evinced, by the people of that place, the unmistakable marks of respect which are shown only to those who are truly worthy. The church was thrown open to receive the remains, and funeral services were again performed.

One of the most touching tokens of respect to the memory of Mr. Johnson, was paid by the manufacturers of North Andover, on the occasion of the funeral. The noisy rattling of machinery, and the busy hum of spindle and loom, which have been heard there almost incessantly through days of joy and sorrow, for so many years, were on *that* day

hushed, — a silent but expressive tribute, alike creditable to the proprietors, and to him whose memory they thus sought to honor.

“ Why weep ye then for him, who, having won
 The bound of man’s appointed years, at last,
 Life’s blessings all enjoyed, life’s labors done,
 Serenely to his final rest has past ;
 While the soft memory of his virtues yet
 Lingers like twilight hues, when the bright sun is set ?

His life was happy ; every day he gave
 Thanks for the fair existence that was his ;
 For a sick fancy made him not her slave,
 To mock him with her phantom miseries.
 No chronic tortures racked his aged limb,
 For luxury and sloth had nourished none for him.

And I am glad that he has lived thus long,
 And glad that he has gone to his reward ;
 Nor deem that kindly nature did him wrong,
 Softly to disengage the vital cord,
Ere his weak hand grew palsied, or his eye
 Dim with the mists of age. *O happy time to die !”*

REMARKS AT THE FUNERAL.

BY THE REV. CHANDLER ROBBINS.

WE have assembled for no empty pageant; for no vain pomp; for no heartless display of grief; for no formal eulogy. We have come to the house of God to gratify no vanity of partial friendship; to indulge no ostentatious taste; to minister to no unworthy pride.

The family and kindred of our deceased brother, whose remains are before us, have reluctantly yielded their own wish for a private and quiet funeral (more agreeable to their own feelings and consistent with the character of the deceased) to the spontaneous and reiterated request of his numerous associates and friends, whose hearts prompted the desire to participate in this last tribute of respect to his memory.

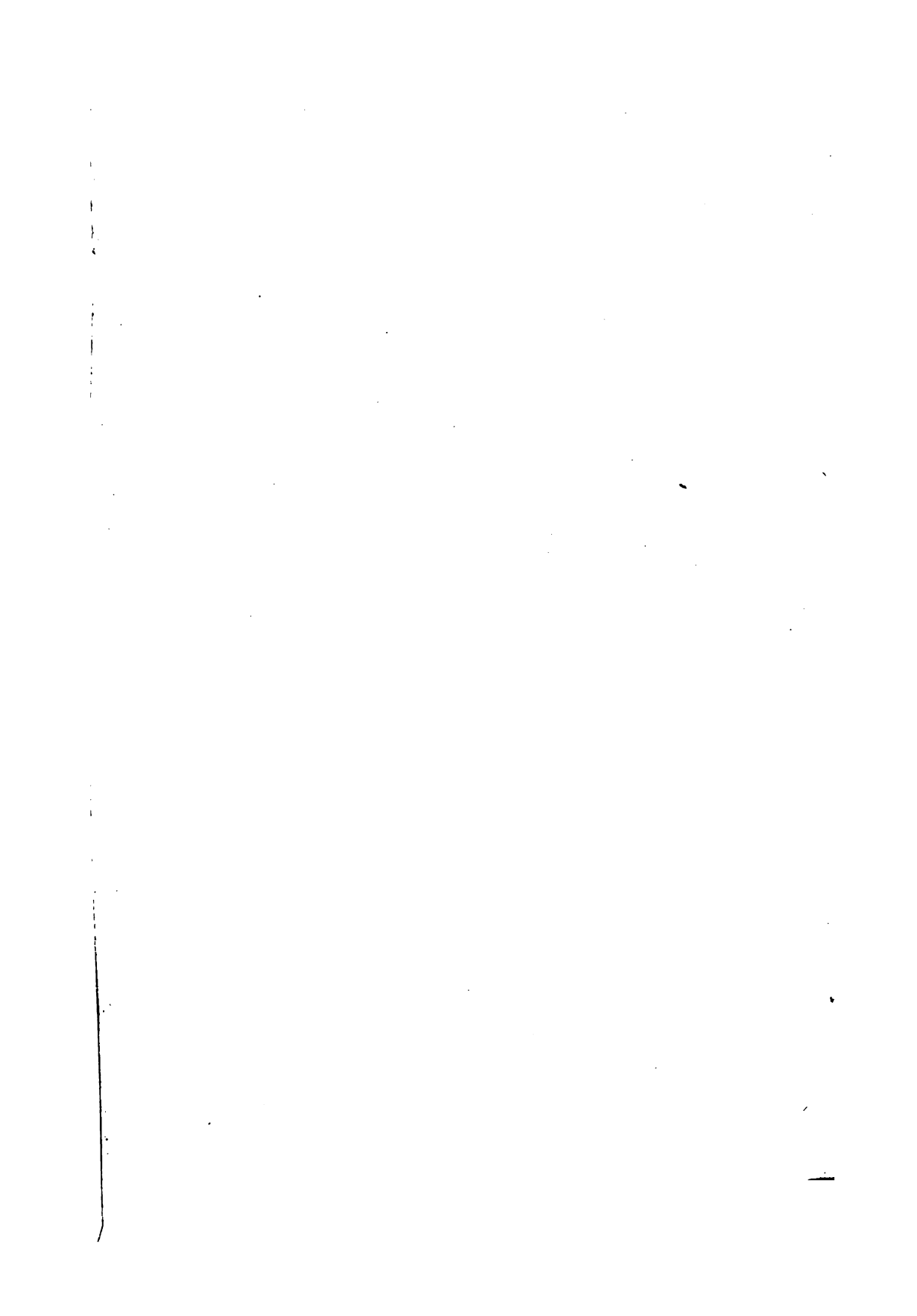
This Church, too, has, of its own accord, thrown open its doors, to receive at its altar the lifeless form of one of its truest friends and firmest supporters, and fairest though meekest ornaments ; whose venerable image has been intimately associated with its sacred ceremonies, and to whom its very walls and stones were dear.

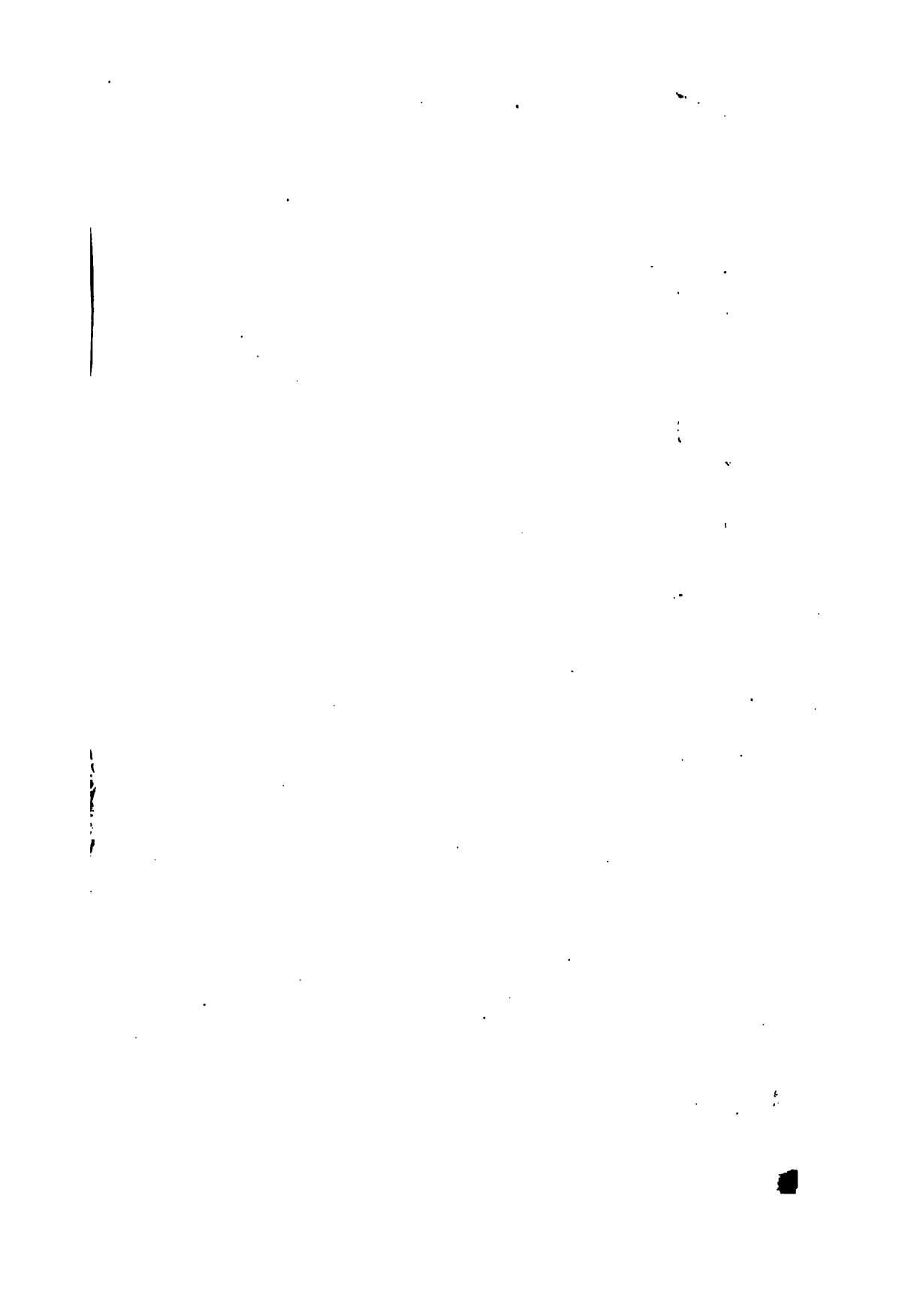
We come to bury a humble-minded man, — upright, sincere, and kind ; who feared his God, and loved his fellow-men, and faithfully served his Heavenly Master by an open confession of allegiance, by an outward walk of obedience, and, better than all, by a *secret conformity of spirit*. We pay him these honors the *more willingly*, because he did not covet them ; and the heartiness of our funeral tribute is the more profound, because it was neither solicited nor expected.

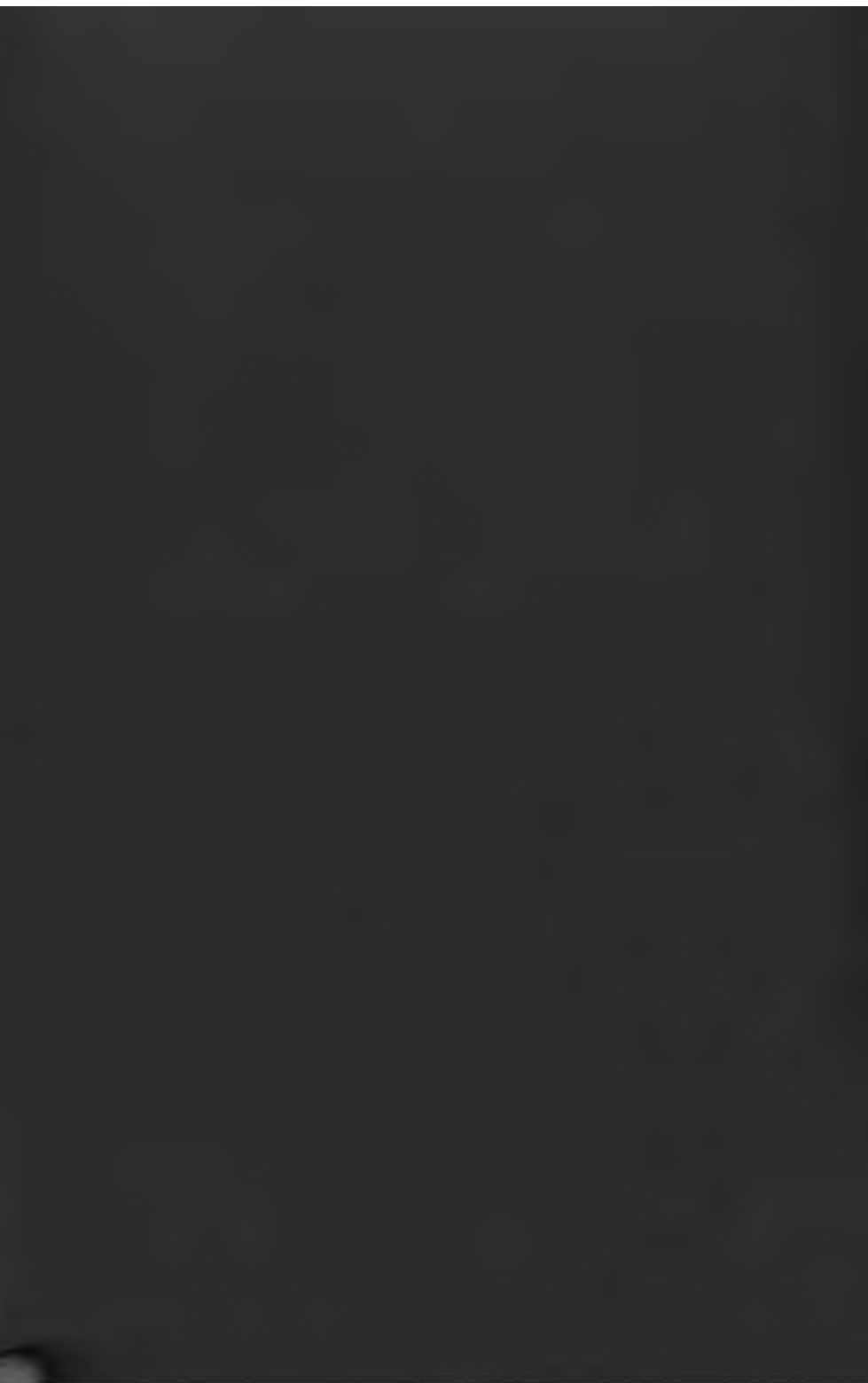
At the interment of such a man, the simplest services are the best. There was a degree of grandeur in the simplicity of his own character, which we would recognize, if we may not be able to express, in his obsequies.

We bury him only with the Word of God and with prayer ; with the language that is suited to the lowliness of man, and the language that declares the

loftiness of God ; with the language that expresses our own dependence and frailty and submission, and the language that reveals to us everlasting consolation and strength.









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